

# THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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## Galton Lecture.

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Eugenists, along with other social reformers, have as their practical aim to improve society. Whereas, indeed, other social reformers concentrate attention on improvement through enviroining conditions, they look rather to improvement through a bettering of inherent inborn quality. But their final end is the same; and, therefore, before them as before all the rest of us, there stands, in the forefront of the battle, that ancient and formidable query "What do you mean by a good society? You have named to us the goal you seek; proceed to define and locate it."

A society is a group of persons. If then we are to settle what we mean by good in society, we must decide first what we mean by good in a single man. And here at once a distinction must be drawn. When we speak of a quality as good, we mean sometimes one and sometimes another of two distinct things; sometimes we mean that the quality is good in itself and ultimately, sometimes that it is an efficient means of promoting something else that is good in itself and ultimately. If we think about our friends and the people among whom we live, we may see very readily how different these two meanings of good are. Here is one we know, open-hearted, sincere, unselfish, responsive to every shade of beauty and every generous appeal, kind, loyal, ardent in living, ardent in pursuit; and here is another, with steel-sharp intellect, trained powers, a machine of incredible efficiency to accomplish any end. The first of these is in himself incomparably good, a star point in the ethical crown of the world,

" . . . . . earth's flower  
She holds up to the softened gaze of God."

The second perhaps is not in himself ultimately good at all, but is greatly good in the other sense, that he is an efficient means to promote what is ultimately good. When we are speaking of inanimate objects or of animals held merely as marketable possessions, there is no risk of confusion here, because a good motor car means simply a motor car that is adapted to particular ends and a good sheep means simply a sheep that will yield wool or mutton in profitable measure. Persons, however, are ends in themselves as well as means to other ends; and so to them the term good is apt to be applied in both senses. This inevitably breeds confusion. It is well, therefore, to keep the word good for qualities that are good ultimately and in themselves: the other we may designate, not as good, but as means to good.

Turn then to our goal of a good society. What we aim at is a society that is in the highest possible degree good in itself; containing persons whose qualities are good in themselves; who are happy—for

happiness is clearly a good; whose mutual relations are intimate and friendly—for sympathy is clearly among the greater goods: the sort of society perhaps that Morris has conceived in his dream of John Ball. But, if this is what we want ultimately as an end in itself, we shall also want other qualities among the members of our society that are not perhaps good in themselves at all, but are an essential means to enable the good society to grow up and maintain itself. You cannot have a beautiful picture unless you have a canvas on which to paint it: you cannot have the good life unless you first have life itself; the artists and poets of Athens could not have adorned the world if there had not been available somewhere the qualities that are necessary to provide the means of subsistence and defence from danger. So, when we ask ourselves how the ideal society at which we aim should be constituted, it will not do merely to imagine to ourselves all the qualities that in themselves we regard as most wonderful and god-like and to pile them all upon every individual. Apart from anything else it may well be held that variety is in itself a good, and that a group of varied persons, each a little less than perfect, will be better than a group of persons all perfect and all exactly alike. But this is not all. We need the qualities that are a means to life as well as those that are inherently good. A world containing nothing but Nietzschean supermen would destroy itself in war: one consisting of nothing but St. Francis of Assisi would perish of its own piety. It would not function, any more than a man would function whose body consisted solely of the most honourable parts of the brain, or an engine consisting exclusively of perfect pistons. To secure the greatest sum of ultimate good, we need a balance: alongside of the qualities that directly contribute to that sum, we need also those that indirectly as means contribute to it and make it possible. This consideration leads up to two further thoughts very puzzling to all social reformers.

The first is this: if we stood over the birth of any child and were given power to endow that child precisely as we wished, we could not settle what qualities it would be best to give him merely from a knowledge of the comparative merits of different qualities. We should need also to know what qualities were being given to all the other children; for we should be concerned with our child's value as a part of the whole, fitting in with and promoting the good of the whole as well as with his value in and for himself. And the second thought is this: even when the qualities of all the other members of our society are given, the endowment we should make to our child would not depend only on the endowment of the others. It would also be relative to the situation in which our society found itself as against the outside world. In a tropical climate, where nature is kindly to man, we should not give the same qualities as in the neighbourhood of the Poles: in a peaceful and serene world we should not give the same as in a world of rapacious imperialisms threatening destruction by war to all who are militarily weak. In view of all these complexities I fear that any social reformer suddenly endowed with omnipotence would find himself in sorry plight.

Let us now suppose that this great difficulty is somehow overcome. The next problem is one more special to the Eugenist. He wishes for certain qualities distributed in a certain way, and the method of

getting them in which he is practically interested is a selective treatment of the birth rate. In order to employ this method effectively—I am not now concerned with the practical difficulty of enforcing laws, for I still assume our reformer to be omnipotent—he needs to be able to infer from the actual qualities of potential parents the inherent nature that children born to them would have, and also to be able to form reasonably clear ideas as to the kind of qualities into which a given inherent nature, subject to the environment with which it would probably be surrounded, would develop. The second of these tasks is a sufficiently serious one; but the first is the one on which I propose to concentrate attention here. Undoubtedly something can be known. Certain notable sorts of physical and mental defect found in potential parents can be recognised with reasonable certainty as congenital, and it is known that congenital or inborn defects in parents are frequently passed on to their children, or reappear in some or all of their children's children. Our omnipotent Eugenist, therefore, may with some confidence pick out a number of obviously degenerate individuals and decree that they shall remain childless. But, if he seeks to go beyond this, he finds himself at once in an uncharted sea. He is face to face with men and women who are the joint product of their inherent inborn qualities and of the environment in which they have lived both before and after birth. Such part of their qualities as is due to environment in any sense he has reason to believe is not heritable and is, therefore, not relevant to the choice he makes of parents for his children. But how can he tell what part of the qualities that he is observing in different people is due to environment and what part to inherent inborn nature? He is not free to make breeding experiments among human beings as he is among animals. He must grope in a twilight of ignorance so dense that it is hardly distinguishable from total darkness. Moreover, there is the further enormous difficulty that the same unit character in a biological sense may carry with it, for all we know, a number of different qualities, some of which may be desirable and others undesirable. If we make a tendency, say, to epilepsy a bar to parentage, we may witlessly deprive ourselves of an unborn Dostoevsky. And there is, further, the awkward fact that, to make a child, two parents are needed, and, for all we know, in life, as in chemistry, a combination of two ingredients that are individually both bitter may yield a compound that is sweet. Yet again, even when the inborn qualities of parents are fully known and the normal result of their combination is also known, there remains the fact of mutations or sports. So far as the descendants of common ancestors in the dim past now appear as stocks of different qualities, mutations *must* have occurred among human beings. Of *how* they occur we know practically nothing; except perhaps—and even this is doubtful—that the occurrence of a sport is the result of the dropping of some genetic ingredient and not of the taking up of a new ingredient. We can never, therefore, be sure that, in preventing two people with “bad inherent qualities” from marrying, we are not robbing the world of a sport that would have represented the greatest genius the world has ever known.

In the face of these considerations it is clear that to no question, in which the Eugenist is interested, is there likely to be any *certain*

answer. After all, however, of what other man's questions cannot the same be said? To the question even whether an internal world exists at all the answer is not *certain*. The Eugenist, if he has to be content with *probable* answers, is no worse off than other people; and the fact that he has to be so content is no reason why he should abandon his enquiries. Look then at one of the issues that to him must now be dominant, and consider what can be said about it, from the point of view not of an unattainable certitude, but of probability. Is there reason to expect that children born in the lower economic strata of society will, when account is taken both of goodness in itself and of capacity to fill an essential place in the economic organism, possess inherent qualities (1) less good in themselves and (2) less efficient as means to the good of the whole, than children born in the higher strata?

If our question was merely whether economic success is a reasonable index of the promise of qualities good in themselves and economic failure a reasonable index of the lack of those qualities, the answer is plainly no. We have no reason to suppose that there is any connection whatever between these two things. But it is not so clear that economic success may not be an index of qualities that are *means* to good, not of course necessarily in any particular individual, but on the average and on the whole. Broadly speaking, a man succeeds economically when he possesses qualities that are useful in rendering service to society. Of course some men rise to wealth through activities that greatly injure society. Of course again a man may succeed on account of the favourable environment into which he has been born in spite of possessing very inferior inherent qualities. None the less, it seems reasonable to hold in a very rough and general way that economic success does indicate the possession of qualities that are means to the good of society, and economic failure a lack of those qualities. If the different economic classes were shut off from one another by a rigid caste system, there would not, indeed, be any reason to believe this. But in actual fact there is a considerable measure of fluidity, and the persons born in the lower classes who possess exceptional efficiency do in fact flow up into the other classes. Let us, then, at all events provisionally, conclude that the true welfare of society is likely to suffer, and a gradual deterioration to take place, if the proportion of children born among the lower social strata exceeds substantially the proportion born among the higher. On the strength of this provisional conclusion I should like to call your attention to two tendencies that have recently become prominent in the sphere of economics and, without myself venturing on any analysis, to suggest that their possible eugenic or dysgenic consequences deserve closer study than economists by themselves are usually qualified to give to them.

The first of these tendencies was noticed some time ago by Dr. Bowley as regards the United Kingdom, and recent statistics show that it has operated in a number of other countries also. Since the period before the war there has been, in the generality of European countries, a very marked narrowing in the gap that separates the wages of skilled from those of unskilled workers. For example, in this country as between 1914 and 1922 the real wages of skilled metal workers rose by 2%, of unskilled metal workers by 33%; the real wages of skilled

builders fell by 4% but those of unskilled builders rose 9%. In Germany the real wages of skilled metal workers fell by 32%, those of unskilled metal workers by only 2%: the real wages of skilled builders by 23%, of unskilled builders by 5%. (*Manchester Guardian Supplement*, Oct. p. 545). In Germany statistics have been prepared which show that this movement has extended throughout society generally. Among Government officials, for example, the higher grades before the war were paid between six and seven times as much as the lowest grade of workers; now they are paid only just over twice as much; and there have been corresponding changes among the intermediate grades. When account is taken of tax payments, which have of course become much more sharply graduated than they were, the levelling of incomes available for expenditure is seen to be even more marked than the levelling of gross incomes. Now it is evident that, when the average rate of real earnings in any country falls heavily, as it has done in Germany, some measure of levelling *must* take place, for the simple reason that there is some minimum below which the wages of the lowest class of workers cannot fall, on pain of starvation. In England, however, the average rate of real wages does not appear to have fallen, and yet the levelling movement has been going on. No doubt, this may prove temporary—the mere aftermath of the war device of adding bonuses based on the cost of living on to wages instead of raising rates of wages. But the war has been finished four years, and, though the most recent figures show some relative fall in unskilled wages, these wages still remain substantially higher, as compared with skilled wages, than they used to be. In any event, even if the change in relative gross earnings is destined to disappear after a few years, there can be little doubt that the system of steeply graduated taxation has come to stay, so that, as between net earnings, after taxes have been paid, the levelling will be permanent. What, if any, effect is this likely to have on the quality of the people? Will it cause the skilled classes to have fewer children relatively to the unskilled classes, and if it does, is there ground for holding that unskilled workers are, on the average, of inferior stock to skilled workers, in a sense that would justify us in looking at the levelling movement with disquietude? Of course, it will be understood that it is not the absolute rise, so far as there has been an absolute rise, in the wages of unskilled workers that is here in question, but the relative rise, or, to put the same thing the other way round, the relative fall in the wages of skilled workers.

The second tendency to which I wish to refer is more complex. Until quite recently it has been an accepted principle that wage payments made by employers to workpeople should not depend at all on the family estate of the different workpeople employed. A bachelor of given skill would be paid the same as a married man with a large family. It was felt that this arrangement was, in a general way, inevitable, because, if wages were made to depend on the size of a man's family, employers would always prefer bachelors or men with small families, so that in any time of reduced demand the whole of what unemployment there was would be concentrated on the men with large families. There is, moreover, a deeper difficulty which does not strike the public eye so readily. The number of people whom it pays em-

employers in the country generally to hire for wages cannot exceed the number which, at the rate of wages they have to pay, just yields a profit at the margin. If the introduction of a system of family wages made the wage for family men higher than the current wage for men in general, which may be presumed in normal times roughly to equate the demand for and the supply of labour, this would cut down employment even in normal times in much the same way that an artificial raising of wages in general to all men would do.

During the Great War a breach was made in the custom of disregarding conjugal and family estate in fixing wages. The payments made to soldiers in effect varied with the size of their families, when account is taken of the maintenance allowances; and war bonuses on account of the increase in the cost of living were paid to members of the police force on the same principle. These arrangements are State arrangements in services not subject to competitive conditions; and, therefore, the difficulties in the way of them, to which I have made reference, did not make themselves felt. For it is, of course, possible for the State to pay different rates to different men if it so chooses, without giving any preference to those men who are cheaper to it; and it is also possible for it to maintain the same number of employees in the face of changes in the marginal wage that it has to pay.

Partly, perhaps, in imitation of this Governmental war policy, poor persons now desire to modify the practice of private industry on similar lines. It is, indeed, recognised that employers cannot be required either by law or by convention to differentiate directly between the wages of bachelors and family men, because, if they did so, family men would be greatly handicapped in the search for employment. But the suggestion has been made by the Chairman of a recent Royal Commission in New South Wales that every employer, in respect of each worker of given quality employed by him, should pay the same given wage in to a central fund and that then, from this central fund, employees should be paid different wage rates according to the size of their families. In Germany, this device, or what is substantially equivalent to it, appears to be coming into wide use. Owing to the serious fall in real wages a family man cannot live on the ordinary rate, and so, in spite of the efforts of trade unions to retain the system of equal wages for equal work, increments for large families are coming to be paid. "Virtually every collective agreement on State wages ordinance now contains this 'social wage' provision in one form or another and in varying gradations. In some cases private employers have contributed, according to the number of workers employed, to common funds for paying these increments, in order to avoid killing the competition of married workers and excluding the fathers of families from the means of bread-winning." (*Manchester Guardian Supplement*, October, p. 564.) The point of the central fund is, of course, that it prevents any individual employer from having to disburse more money when he employs a married man than when he employs a single man, and also prevents him from having to disburse more money than before in respect of *any* (say) thousandth man. His payment in respect of each worker can be kept exactly the same as it used to be, and, consequently, there is no

tendency either to discriminate against married men in hiring labour or to cut down employment as a whole. What happens in effect is that the bachelors in each industry are taxed for the benefit of the family men in that industry, the amount of the tax being different in different industries according to the proportion of bachelors, men with small families and men with large families engaged in them. The fact that the tax is different in different industries is plainly, from the point of view of equity, a disadvantage in this system, as compared with a system under which bachelors in general should be taxed for the benefit of married men with families in general. But, from the point of view interesting to Eugenists, the arrangement is substantially equivalent to one in which, throughout industry, bachelors and married men without children should be taxed in order to provide a bounty to men with large families. The principle is the same as that embodied in the rule that income tax shall be levied at a higher rate on bachelors and at a progressively lower rate on men with families of varying sizes. It is also the same as that underlying the legal enforcement of any sort of national minimum standard since, obviously, greater help is likely to be needed to bring a family man up to any assigned standard than to bring a bachelor up to it.

Now it appears *prima facie* that any arrangement under which men with large families receive a bounty proportionate to the size of their families at the expense of the rest of the community must tend to increase the quantity of the population. There is, indeed, a consideration, not usually made prominent, which militates against this tendency. In so far as the great majority of people pass successively through the stages of bachelor, small family man and large family man, each individual may be regarded as giving a bounty only to himself. In the days of bachelorhood money that a man would have put by to provide for marriage and a family is taken from him in taxes and given to a man who already has a family; and, later on, he is compensated by receiving money taken from a younger bachelor. So far as this picture represents the facts, the absorption by the State of money which bachelors would have saved against marriage and the getting of families must discourage them from this enterprise in exactly the same degree as the prospect of having the money given back to them when they do have families encourages them, so that no net encouragement is given to the growth of population. But, of course, in fact things do not work like this; for there are a number of men who will remain bachelors or will have small families in any event, and thus can look to no bounty to balance the tax laid on them. Therefore there is bound to result from a policy of this kind some economic stimulus to the getting of families and so some tendency towards an increase of population.

Eugenists, however, are interested, not so much in the quantity as in the *quality* of population. How this is affected depends on how far the bounty at the expense of bachelors is applied more strongly to the worse or to the better stocks of the country. There is nothing in the nature of things to prevent it from being applied to all classes of employees from Field Marshals, Prime Ministers, Civil Servants, Municipal Officers, and so forth down to the lowest grade of manual worker. But as a matter of fact the political urge to employ

it is likely to be much stronger among the lower grades, for the simple reason that, among them, as is illustrated by recent German experience, the pressure on a family man trying to subsist on the ordinary uniform wage is especially severe. Hence, as a matter of practice the bounty, if not absolutely, at all events as compared with normal earnings, is likely to be largest and most potent among the lower economic classes. If then we presume these classes to embody on the average worse stocks, the bounty will be applied most forcibly in favour of worse stocks.

Now, when we set together these two recent movements, the relative rise in the wages of unskilled workers and the tendency to make wages among the poorer classes depend in part on family estate, we are brought up against a very important distinction. An improvement in the fortunes of a particular class of poor people independently of the number of their children is one thing; an improvement proportioned to the number of their children quite a different thing. It is by no means clear that an improvement in fortune of the first sort will lead to larger families; Professor Brentano and others hold, on the evidence of the relatively low birth rate among the better-to-do, that it may quite well have the opposite effect. But an improvement in fortune of the second sort definitely differentiates in favour of large families. This sort of improvement can hardly fail to promote large families among the people to whom the prospect of it is held out. Hence *prima facie* Eugenists have greater cause for disquietude in regard to the second of these two recent tendencies than in regard to the first.

Even here, however, it would be rash, on the basis of existing knowledge, to speak with any assurance. It must be remembered that, as things are at present, members of the very lowest economic class do not regulate the size of their families by economic considerations, and that their children, if they cannot themselves support them, are in fact supported at the public expense. Hence a bounty, based on the size of families, among manual wage earners generally would not cause the lowest type of wage earner to have more children than he has now. It would, however, affect in this way the higher types of wage earners. These higher types of wage earners would thus come to have larger families than before relatively to the lowest type of wage earners as well as, perhaps, relatively to the professional classes. The expansion of the middle section, being thus at the expense of both extremes, cannot, on any assumption about the relation between economic status and racial quality, be condemned *a priori* as injurious on the whole. The issue is one that could only be settled, if it can be settled at all, on the basis of a very laborious enquiry in which Eugenists, Economists and Statisticians would all need to play a part.

That leads me to my concluding word. For there are many borderline problems in like case with this one. Eugenists must often find themselves engaged in enquiries that have an economic aspect; and Economists with enquiries that have an Eugenic one. I have been happy to have been invited to deliver this lecture, small though my qualification for the honour is, because in our momentary contact this evening, there is a sort of symbol that we mutually recognise the need for one another's help.